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Turned out NYC congregations evicted from public schools

NEW YORK CITY (BP) — About 60 churches in New York City have less than two months to find a home before a court ruling takes effect and forces them to abandon the city's public school buildings.

The churches were meeting in the buildings on Sundays, when school was not in session. The congregations — six are Southern Baptist — have known for years that this day might be coming, but that fact hasn't made it any easier for them to move by Feb. 12. The case dates back to 1994.

"Effectively, they're homeless on the second Sunday in February," George Russ, executive director of the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, told Baptist Press. "They're all scrambling to figure out where they can go and how they can make a good transition in their neighborhood."

The legal case drew to a close in 2011 when the U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a New York City Department of Education rule that prevents school buildings from being used for "religious worship services." Conservative groups had expected the Supreme Court to take the case and reverse the Second Circuit, but the high court declined in early December to even hear the case.

The city council or the New York legislature could nullify the rule, but Russ said he isn't optimistic that will happen.

The Southern Baptist congregations range in size from about 75 people to approximately 400 people. That largest church, The Journey, might have the toughest time finding a space.

Movie theaters are a possibility, Russ said, but their hours aren't as flexible and they're also more expensive. The schools were changing the congregations only a nominal fee. He said movie theaters in New York City also tend to open for business on Sunday earlier than those in other cities.

There are other possibilities: hotels, Elks Lodges, and receptions halls. All, though, will come at a high price financially and

all need to be in the general vicinity of their current location.

"A church needs to be in a neighborhood where your people come from," Russ said. "A church member is not going to commute from Queens to Manhattan just to go to church one day a week. Very few churches in the city are cosmopolitan in the sense that they draw from every borough."

The congregations, Russ said, had "extremely positive" relationships with the schools. "The churches that I work with have excellent relationships with the school administrators and had even gone and done extra projects to express their appreciation," he said.

Russ said one Southern Baptist church in the city bought new furniture for a teacher's lounge. Another church gave video equipment to a school's video production staff. One church planter has even headed up a team of volunteers during the past few years to paint various schools. Last year, they worked at three different schools.

"Now we can't even meet in the schools. So it's quite ironic," Russ said.

The Metropolitan New York Baptist Association's office space has a chapel with about 100 seats that can be used for one church until it finds more permanent space, Russ said.

Church leaders are positive about the situation. "It is an inconvenience, but they are saying, 'Our identity is not in a building,'" Russ said. "Our identity is who we are as a body. It forces them to rethink their whole ministry strategy."

"Some are thinking about decentralizing, saying maybe we need two locations instead of one because of where our people come from. I think some are looking at this really from a real prayerful and missional kind of way, saying, 'How can we best be the body of Christ in this city? I'm trusting that God's

going to use this for His good."

The case was Bronx Household of Faith v. Board of Education. Jordan Lorence, an attorney with the Alliance Defense Fund organization that fought the city rule in court, said churches in other cities that meet in school buildings should not necessarily be concerned.

He said New York City is the only city among the Top 50 U.S. school districts with such a law.

"The Supreme Court has not repudiated its earlier decisions supporting the First Amendment rights of religious groups to meet in public build-

ings on the same terms as other community groups," Lorence wrote in an analysis piece.

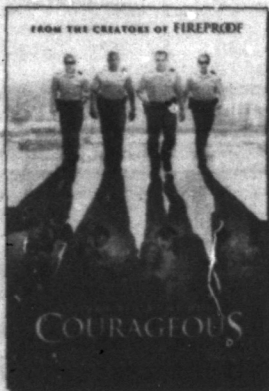
"What the Supreme Court did Dec. 5 is decline to review the Bronx Household of Faith decision. Although this was very disappointing, the court's action did not affirm the lower court ruling, or repudiate any of its earlier opinions supporting equal access for religious groups. Equal access is still the law of the land, according to the Supreme Court."

Most federal appeals courts, he wrote, have rejected what the appeals court in New York approved.

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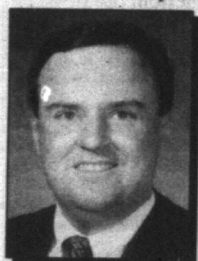
'Courageous'
becomes top
Sherwood film

ALBANY, Ga. (BP) — The film *Courageous* has become the top-grossing film for producer Sherwood Church in Albany, Ga., passing its previous top film, *Fireproof*. With \$33.5 million in total gross, *Courageous* bettered *Fireproof*'s \$33.45 million in late December although it is currently playing in fewer than 100 theaters and comes out on DVD Jan. 17. The church, which gets only a portion of a film's total gross, also made the 2006 film, *Facing the Giants*, and an earlier movie named *Flywheel*. All are Christian-themed.





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Dear Legislator ...

The 2012 session of the Mississippi Legislature is revving up to full speed, as proposed legislation moves to committees and will soon be coming up on a series of deadlines.

As anyone knows who even casually tracks the annual three-month sessions of the Legislature, many bills are introduced but relatively few make it into law. The complex set of checks and balances both inside the legislative process and in the broader branches of state government have a tendency to winnow the hundreds and hundreds of bills that are filed and pre-filed for each session.

Legislators have to absorb their share of criticism, cynicism, and caricature during their time under the hoary domes of the New Capitol in downtown Jackson. Some of the ridicule showered on them is likely deserved (by some of them, anyway), but a fair amount is not deserved.

They are, after all, our fellow Mississippians. For every citizen who couldn't find their way to either chamber in the Capitol but feels free to regularly slam legislators, there are at least a few of us who realize that most legislators are well-meaning people who must put aside their families, businesses, and community activities for one-quarter of each year to come to Jackson for the session.

That's no small sacrifice, so it would behoove us to occasionally tell them how much we appreciate the effort even as we loudly complain about what we perceive they are doing or not doing.

The Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission (CAC) has some helpful hints on how to make contact with legislators, how to get a point across without dooming

favored legislation, and how to follow up on the progress of important measures:

- **The best communicating is done face-to-face.** Make an appointment and be on time. Bring an outline of the one or two main issues you want to discuss. Be brief, recommend specific solutions, and leave a written summary of your important points.

- **It's fair to ask the legislator for his/her position on the bills in which you are interested.** Don't take it personally if the legislator disagrees. Rather than argue, discuss differences in a pleasant manner.

- **If a personal visit is not possible, write your legislator.** Writing can save a legislator's time (a plus in your favor) and provides a record of your position on proposed legislation. Include your full name, address, and telephone number. The address for legislators while in session is P.O. Box 1018, Jackson, MS 39215-1018.

Individual e-mail addresses can be accessed at www.ls.state.ms.us.

- **Do your research.** Know the bills about which you are writing, and include any specific information you have such as the bill number and details. Bill status can be attained by calling (601) 359-3719 while the legislature is in session, or by going to www.ls.state.ms.us.

- **Telephone calls do not substitute for personal visits and letters.** When telephoning legislators, however, make efficient use of

your time with them. Identify yourself and the bills you are for or against (again, one or two main issues is a good limit). Explain your reasoning and let them know how you want them to vote.

The telephone number for legislators while they are in session is (601) 359-3770. Just

as with personal visits and letters, end the conversation by expressing your thanks for their time.

- **Citizens can request to testify before committees about bills they strongly support or oppose.** Find out the name of the appropriate committee chairman and contact him/her as soon as possible. If given the opportunity to testify, get to the

point quickly and be prepared to answer any questions legislators may have about your position.

The CAC, a ministry funded by the Mississippi Cooperative Program, stands ready to assist Mississippi Baptists who want to get involved in this grand process of self-governance we enjoy in our state and nation. They can be reached at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3329 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 329. Fax: (601) 292-3350. E-mail: rmccollum@christianaction.com.

Take the time to get involved, or else just be content with whatever comes out of the legislative pipeline. Those are really our only two choices.



I work with a group of Christian attorneys in a full-time ministry devoted to defending religious freedom in America. We don't lack for work. Strangely, in a country founded first and foremost on the principle of religious liberty, we find a growing hostility throughout the legal system and the culture at large toward people of faith.

These are not just questions of faith vs. secularism. They go to the very heart of civil liberties in a democratic republic. The Christians our alliance represents are not looking for special legal privileges or indulgences, but for the most basic freedoms protected by the U.S. Constitution. Why, then, are Christians so often singled out for the blurring or suspension of these rights — in many cases, with the permission of courts designed to protect our freedoms?

Why is the so-called separation of church and state such a one-way street, with churches barred from influencing government but government freed to run increasingly roughshod over the church?

A primary reason for that hostility, in what has traditionally been recognized and acclaimed as a "Christian nation," is personified, perhaps, in the contrast between two current pop culture sensations. One is a pro football

GUEST OPINION:



A tale of two pop sensations

By Alan Sears
Scottsdale, Az.

quarterback, the other an acclaimed R&B singer.

The latter is already regarded, at the tender age of 23, as one of the best-selling recording artists of all time. Her latest album, which in its first two weeks went platinum in the UK, features this quote in the liner notes: "Lord, you have always been so good to me! Thank You for your LOVE, guidance, protection, the blessings that You continue to bestow upon me, and the people around me! I will always keep my eyes on You Lord."

That's as outspoken a statement of faith as you're likely to find on any CD not recorded by the Gaithers. Unfortunately, most of the songs on the album itself involve vivid celebrations of promiscuous sex in language too explicit for this website.

The quarterback, on the other hand, while just as outspoken about his faith, seems to make a point of living it out clearly, even

boldly, in every setting whether that's kneeling in prayer in the end zone, encouraging his fellow players in practice, or avowing his virginity and mission work to reporters in a press conference.

The singer enjoys critical acclaim and a shelf full of music awards, while the quarterback remains a figure of considerable debate, controversy, and ridicule among fellow players, fans, and sportswriters.

The difference? The singer's odes to Divinity in no way inhibit her exhibitionist embrace of a licentious culture, while the quarterback seems determined to follow a game plan for his life that deliberately sets him apart from our sex-saturated society.

The singer's mix of words and lifestyle suggest that being in good with God doesn't have to mean living any differently from people who despise Him. You can have your angel food cake and feast on devil's food, too.

The quarterback's actions, meanwhile, assert that to be Christian is not only to acknowledge God, but to take Him seriously including His directives for our moral choices and personal behavior.

That difference is the scrimmage line of our cultural struggle between people of faith and those who abhor any hint of religion in public life. The singer's example suggests that the God to whom so many tip their hat is naught but a glorified Santa Claus — no less sweet, no more real — but if the quarterback is right, God not only exists, but is holy, omniscient, omnipotent, and the One "to Whom we all must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

That places a fearsome responsibility on a fearfully irresponsible age, and that is why Christians must be proven wrong. That is why they must be sidelined, satirized, and silenced. That is why, more and more, their civil liberties are up for grabs.

Sears is president and CEO of the Alliance Defense Fund (www.allianceadefund.org), a legal alliance employing a combination of strategy, training, funding, and litigation to protect and preserve religious liberty, the sanctity of life, marriage, and the family. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press.

Nation marks anniversary as Christianity grows

DHAKA, Bangladesh (BP) — A Bangladeshi man picks up his microphone and begins to sing. He's a muezzin, a man appointed by the mosque to herald the call to prayer.

Five times a day, devout Muslims unfurl their mats, face Mecca and pray to Allah. As the call to prayer begins it wafts around corners, over buildings, and finally seeps into a nearby Baptist church building where men and women gather to worship God.

The pastor pauses at the podium, distracted momentarily by the call to prayer. He continues preaching from Psalms.

During the observance of the 40th anniversary of their nation's independence from Pakistan in mid-December, Christians in Bangladesh said they have more to celebrate — like the inroads they are making into Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim communities in this predominantly Muslim nation.

Dec. 16 is known as Liberation Day in this nation of more than 158 million people, the day when East Pakistan won its independence from Pakistan in 1971 and was renamed Bangladesh.

The first Southern Baptists came to Bangladesh in 1957 by boat. Burt Galvin (not his real name), an International Mission Board (IMB) worker, has served in South Asia for the past 17 years. He said when the first Southern Baptists came to Bangladesh there were only 11 churches in a convention with doctrinal beliefs that aligned with Southern Baptists.

In the first 20 years of Southern Baptist work in Bangladesh, only five churches were added to their partner convention. In the 1970s, Galvin noted, a new strategy developed for sharing the Gospel that led to a church planting movement among Hindus.



MARKING ANNIVERSARY — Meena Alom sells flowers to visitors at the national memorial of Bangladeshi independence outside Dhaka. In the 54 years since the end of British colonial rule, the Bangladeshi people have faced a struggle to retain their identity, first to retain Bangla as the national language and, 40 years ago, to gain their independence from Pakistan. (BP photo)

"Within 15 - 20 years, 200 churches were planted," Galvin said.

In the 1980s, a church planting movement started among Bangladesh's tribal people groups, which grew to around 200 churches. Today there are 475 churches in the Bangladeshi Baptists' convention that represent Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim-background believers across the nation.

The number continues to grow as IMB workers and national believers continue to share the Gospel with an increasingly receptive audience.

"It gives me the goosebumps," said Jaci Aurora (not her real name), who serves with her husband among Bangladesh's tribal people groups. "We're seeing the results from those who served in the

past."

Though significant strides have been made, Christians in Bangladesh account for well under one percent of the total population. With Muslims accounting for around 85% of Bangladesh's population, making it the fourth-largest Muslim country in the world, ministry among Muslims has begun to take off in the past 15 years.

Darryl Pogue (not his real name), an IMB worker, estimates that since 1997 more than 10,000 baptisms have been recorded and 1,500 house churches started among Muslims in Bangladesh. Currently, there are six church planting movements among Muslims related to IMB workers and Southern Baptist volunteers.

Bangladeshi believers come from various religious backgrounds: In the 40 years since independence, Muslim imams have become church planters, Buddhist tribal leaders discovered heaven is for real, and Hindu priests set aside their gods for the one true God.

Jibril Zaman (not his real name), a former imam, risked everything by sharing his testimony over a loudspeaker in his

mosque. Thirty imams now call Jesus Lord because of Zaman. He's received discipleship training from IMB workers and is putting it into practice.

Suraj Chakma (not his real name), partners with IMB workers to share the Gospel among the Chakmas, a Buddhist people group in Bangladesh. Suraj continues to share despite persecution from Buddhist monks in his area.

Mathura Boren Tripura (not his real name) was the first person in his community of Tripura tribal people to believe. There are now 100 churches in his area. Among these tribes, there are second- and third-generation believers who are now sending out their own evangelists to share with other people groups.

Guarav Dutta (not his real name), a former Brahmin priest, has seen hundreds accept Christ through his witness. His vision is for 10% of Bangladesh's population to be saved before he dies. He's 58 years old.

Travis and Madison Strauder (not their real names) are praying for a church planting movement among Muslims in Dhaka. The Strauders are IMB workers based in Dhaka and are focusing their ministry on Muslims.

Travis Strauder said historically many believers from the minority Hindu and Buddhist have been afraid to share with Muslims. They are overcoming their fear, Strauder said, noting that believers from tribal people groups and from a Hindu background are stepping out of their comfort zone and sharing with their Muslim neighbors.

The Strauders are setting an example to follow in the church they attend. Most of the members of this church come from Christian families or from a Hindu background. The church now does outreach in Muslim areas and members are sharing the Gospel with Muslim neighbors.

Strauder partners with Qahir Hamad (not his real name), a Muslim background believer and house church pastor, to reach Muslims in Dhaka. Strauder and Hamad are in the midst of a discipleship and church planning training for the 35 members of his house church.



MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

**THE SECOND
FRONT PAGE**

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VOL. 136

No. 1



**YOU CAN RESPOND
RIGHT NOW!**

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Funding restored

WASHINGTON (BP) — Funding for abstinence education has returned to the federal budget in the spending bill passed by Congress and signed by President Obama. The one trillion dollar budget, which staves off another potential government shutdown, allocates five million dollars for abstinence-based Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA) programs that were slashed by the Obama administration beginning in 2009. Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association, told the Focus on the Family-affiliate CitizenLink that the restoration of funding is a "step in the right direction." Abstinence-only education has been under fire by critics who argue that it is ineffective and leaves teens at greater risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases if they engage in sex. Advocates for abstinence education, meanwhile, point to new evidence suggesting their programs are having a positive impact. A Feb. 1, 2010, study published in the Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine measured the effectiveness of abstinence-only education versus "safe sex" and "comprehensive" sex education by assigning high-risk students to one of the three programs. The study indicated that abstinence-only education was more effective in convincing students to refrain from sex.

Looking back

10 years ago

Gulfshore Assembly, Pass Christian, anticipates a "landmark year" on the 25th anniversary of being reopened in the aftermath of Hurricane Camille, according to assembly manager Frank Simmons.

20 years ago

A Cuban Baptist pastor's Christmas day sermon is the first evangelical message heard on Cuban radio in 28 years, according to the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

50 years ago

Nearly 4000 persons greeted the New Year at a special New Year's Eve service at First Church, Dallas, Tex., that featured a four-and-a-half hour preaching-marathon by pastor W.A. Criswell.

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QCDCSL LSJ: HOCEIC

Clue: G = R

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error.

COURAGE TO FACE THE FUTURE

Courage is an interesting piece of life. You can find it in great leaders or in the most distant follower. You can also notice when it is missing in people of any profession or persuasion. While no doubt there are multiple elements that go into the package of a great leader, I personally believe that consistently the one major difference in leadership and significant or transforming leadership is found in that one word courage.

God recognized that when Moses was leaving the scene and He was bringing to the forefront a new leader that his greatest challenge would be courage. So it is that God speaks to Joshua and tells him to be of great courage. I am confident that there are probably 10,000 books on the market today on leadership. Each one of them has a special twist that may have to do with planning, implementation, management, education, strength, or sincerity. A study of peoples' lives that make a difference whether in politics, preaching, a military leader or a mom helping her children through the perils of adolescent development show that courage is needed.

Sometimes courage will cause you to stand up and speak up. At other times it takes greater courage to sit down and not speak. The title of this article is slightly misleading because courage is always needed. Here we are on the verge of the days of a New Year. Facing the uncertainties of these days ahead will take courage. But look in either direction and it will also take courage to deal with the past. It takes courage to deal with the present moment as well as mustering up courage to look down each one of the 366 streets that we will travel in the upcoming year. I know that you will need courage because one of the dilemmas of life is that you basically can't stop and you cannot turn around, run, and hide. You have to travel each one of these days regardless of the weather and regardless of the things that you have experienced in the past. Here they come one at a time and you will need courage to walk down many of them.

Let me take just a moment to address what courage is. If you were to look up the word in the dictionary, you would find that there are a number of definitions. Of course, there are books that are written on this one word. Just what is it? Well I can tell you one of the things that it is not. **Courage is not the absence of fear.** From time to time everyone experiences



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

fear whether on the battlefield, in business, at the birthing of a child, or in the beginning of a new relationship. You need not think that you are the only person who ever experienced the twinges of fear that may come to your heart that creates the opposite of courage which is to be discouraged. Your heart is drained, your emotions seem to be stunned, and you wonder how you can go on.

Without spending too much time on the definition, let me just throw out what courage seems to be again and again. Years ago I read that someone said, "Courage is not letting your fear shape your decisions." That thought carried into the Book of Joshua and wrapped around the new leader of God's people seems to be the overriding case again and again. He would not let his fear whether facing the enemy or encouraging the people shape his decisions. So whether you are looking at the past, the present, or looking into the future, what do you do in order to have courage? Let me give you three words that may help you as you face whatever may be ahead of you in this New Year.

The first word is right. Whatever decisions you are making and whatever you are going to do one of the first steps in the process should be to do what is right. What is right from simply a truth standpoint? An extension of that is what is right in relationship to how your decisions will impact others. What is right for everyone involved? I would suggest to you that as you evaluate right you need to understand that there are multiple dimensions of doing right. The Bible says that Jesus was filled with grace and truth. Sometimes when people get postured in wanting to do right and declare they stand on the truth, they fail to recognize a God of grace. Possibly there is no better place that this could be seen than when a group or maybe better stated a mob of people brought a lady before Jesus and cast her down. There they stood on the truth demanding that He join them in destroying her for the truth. She should be stoned. That is what the law says and that is what they demanded.

In His own amazing way, Jesus opened up a larger

arena to look at doing right. He offered them the opportunity of stoning but He said, "Which of you without sin would like to start the process?" Surely the people who were gathered around the lady angry and ready to carry out the sentence and eager to drag Jesus into their righteous stand probably knew each other. More importantly they were probably known by each other. So who is going to be first to cast a stone? One by one they slithered away remembering that they had something else that they needed to do until only the lady was there. Jesus said, "Where are your accusers?" Then He told her, "You go and sin no more." Doing right was not stoning, but in this case it was not condemning.

The second word that I would give you is light. In fact, this light is much like the two headlights on your car. One bright shining light that you have is the clarity of the Word of God and the other light that God has provided for us as believers is the presence of the Spirit of God. You need not face a day without these two lights shining in your heart and lighting the path up for you day by day. Proverbs 3:5-6 is a favorite of so many and could be a favorite of yours this year. As the Scripture says, "Trust in the Lord with all of thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all of thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths." How will He do that? Well you

can read His Word and day by day you will hear Him speaking to you. Moment by moment you can feel His presence with you. Whether storm clouds rise or the sun is shining bright, you will have light.

The third word is might. As most of you well know, it takes strength to be courageous. And I might add that it takes far more strength than you have on your own. It is strength from God and the might of His presence that is needed. So often I have watched as people pretend to have great courage, but because they actually don't have God given courage they seek to muster it up on their own. Rather than appearing courageous they begin to look like a bully. They posture and push but actually do not stand courageously. But you can have might, strength, and an inner power that only God can provide. You can walk with Him, live in Him, and exhibit His strength in all of the days ahead.

Happy New Year and be of good courage!

The author can be contacted at
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MS Positions

UNITY BAPTIST CHURCH, MOSELLE, MS. IS ACCEPTING RESUMES FOR A FULL-TIME PASTOR. Please mail resumes to Unity Baptist Church, P.O. Box 156, Moselle, MS 39459. Attention: Pastor Search Committee.

CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH IN BROOKHAVEN, MS. IS SEEKING A PART-TIME MINISTER OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH. Resumes may be emailed to questions@cbbcbrookhaven.org or mailed to P.O. Box 591, Brookhaven, MS, 39602.

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First Person: The war isn't over; much is left to be done

By Sara Horn
Correspondent

I missed the initial news reports this past week that our final troops had left Iraq. These days I listen more to people and less to pundits. My husband, a Navy reservist for 15 years, just returned in August from his second deployment.

Watching some of the later reports, I saw smiles and jubilant fist pumps as the media covered some of the troops leaving the Iraq border — but the war for our military families isn't over. Don't mistakenly believe that it is. Many continue to serve in Afghanistan and there is no end to that war anytime soon.

When I polled some military wives through our Wives of Faith ministry, happiness and elation were not the emotions that were shared. Instead, they spoke of worry and frustration that military families will be forgotten completely under the high-flying banner of, "The War is Over."

As one military wife said, "Even in peacetime, there are always troops in harm's way."

Certainly, a chapter is turning with our nation and as a new one begins to be written, churches and individuals alike still have an opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus to many tired, weary and, in some cases, hurting people.

As a church, how can you show support to a military family and let them know they are thought of and they are loved?



Horn

• Provide spiritual support to meet veterans and their families' various needs. If you're part of a church, you have some wonderful opportunities to make a difference not just in one or two military families, but many in your community by opening your doors and letting them know they are welcome.

Start a ministry for military wives

and/or military moms, or a group that specializes in supporting PTSD and combat-related struggles. Military Ministry, a division of Campus Crusade for Christ, is a great place to start when looking for combat trauma resources. You may find that you not only reach the current veteran, but veterans of past wars as well, including our Vietnam vets.

Invite them to your regular activities but consider also providing special activities just for them, such as Bible studies specifically on deployment or a meal for spouses and their children whose service members are away.

Encourage your small groups to adopt a military family or a single service member during his or her time away from home on deployment. Send care packages and cards, and let him or her know your group is praying. Now, more than ever, they need reminders that people appreciate what they're doing. Pray for military service members and families, and let them know that they're being prayed for.

• Invite them into your lives and your families. Sometimes churches become accustomed to the comings and goings of military families and it's easy to overlook them, simply because they may not be there long enough to really put down roots. Give them a start to those roots by inviting them over to your home for lunch or activities with your family or small group at church. Get to know them and let them get to know you. A

moment of your time can make an enormous impact to someone who feels alone.

• If you don't know a military service member or family, support an organization that does. There are some wonderful ministries and organizations out there that are making a tangible difference for our troops and their families. Soldiers Angels (soldiersangels.org) and Operation Homefront (operationhomefront.net) are just a couple, along with the ministry I lead, Wives of Faith (wivesoffaith.org), which is working to create a local group curriculum to provide churches the tools to support and serve military spouses in their churches and communities.

The war is not over, and I believe one of the greatest tools Satan uses to hurt and destroy is to conquer and divide by convincing people we are all alone. None of us are alone when we have Jesus by our side.

Take a moment today to think about what you can do to remind our military and their families of this very fact, and be the hands and feet of Jesus to a service member or veteran and their families today.

Editor's note: Horn is the founder and president of Wives of Faith (wivesoffaith.org), a military wives ministry. Visit Horn's website at sarahorn.com. Her commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press.

LifeWay pulls Bibles with Planned Parenthood connection

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP and local reports) — The president of LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville says the Southern Baptist entity is pulling all copies of a special pink-covered Bible that partially benefited breast cancer charity Susan G. Komen for the Cure, because some of Komen's affiliates have given money to the nation's largest abortion provider.

"As this project has developed, we realized it was a mistake," LifeWay President Thom S. Rainer said in a statement released Dec. 14.

For each sale of the Here's Hope Breast Cancer Awareness Bible — published by LifeWay's publishing arm, B&H — one dollar was donated to Susan G. Komen. Earlier this year the pro-life group American Life League reported that 18 of Komen's affiliates had given more than \$600,000 to Planned Parenthood during 2009-10, the last year for which stats are available.

No Mississippi affiliates of Susan G. Komen were listed as contributing to Planned Parenthood, which played a major role in defeating Initiative 26, also known as the Personhood Amendment, in last fall's Mississippi gen-

eral election. The proposed constitutional amendment would have defined personhood as beginning at the moment of fertilization.

Although Planned Parenthood does not have an abortion facility in Mississippi, the group's affiliates around the country were responsible for contributing a large amount of the \$1.3 million that was funneled to anti-Initiative 26 groups in the state.

Komen said the money was for breast exams, but the fact that Planned Parenthood is the nation's largest abortion provider caused pro-life organizations to criticize the Komen ties to Planned Parenthood.

"When our leadership discovered the overwhelming concern that some of Komen's affiliates were giving funds to Planned Parenthood, we began the arduous process of withdrawing this Bible from the market," Rainer said. "Though we have assurances that Komen's funds are used only for breast cancer screening and awareness, it is not in keeping with LifeWay's core values to have even an indirect relationship with Planned Parenthood."

Rainer also stated, "B&H's

mission to advance the Gospel through distribution of God's Word is unchanged, so we will continue to seek

innovative ways that are in keeping with LifeWay's core values."

The Bibles were not sold in LifeWay's stores but at mass retailers like Walmart, said Marty King, spokesman for LifeWay Christian Resources. The initial goal was to "get the Bible into the hands of people who may not frequent LifeWay Christian Stores or LifeWay.com."

"We're working with those companies now to withdraw the Bible, but that can't happen overnight," King said.

Komen has tried to distance itself from Planned Parenthood's abortion practices, saying in a statement that "under no circumstances are Komen funds used to fund abortions or other non-breast services."

"Annually, Affiliates fund programs that provide breast health education and breast

"Planned Parenthood doesn't do mammograms. What Planned Parenthood does do is abortion."

— Carol Tobias
president
National Right to Life
Committee

Jersey funded two Planned Parenthood locations, meaning 18 Komen affiliates gave money to 19 Planned Parenthood locations.

Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee, wrote a column in the October issue of Catholic business magazine *Legatus* bemoaning the fact that Susan G. Komen, often seen as a worthy charity, has such ties.

"Almost everyone in America knows a woman who has had breast cancer," Tobias wrote. "Some of those beloved

Komen programs that health education screenings for hundreds of thousands of low-income, uninsured, or medically under-served women via nearly 2,000 local organizations, including 19 Planned Parenthood programs," Komen said in a statement.

One Komen affiliate in New Jersey funded two Planned Parenthood locations, meaning 18 Komen affiliates gave money to 19 Planned Parenthood locations.

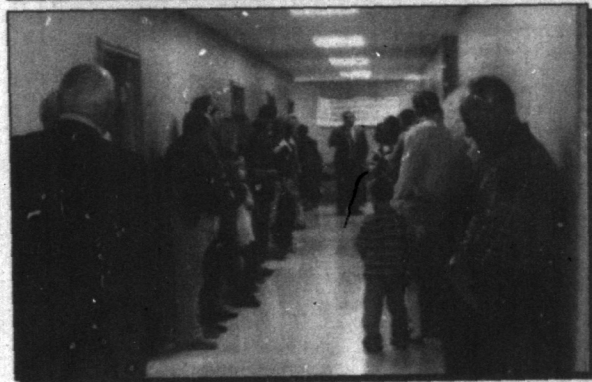
friends and family members may have died from it. So when an organization like Susan G. Komen for the Cure conducts fundraising projects for research, it's difficult to say no.

"We're encouraged to help by buying a certain brand of yogurt or a certain soft drink. Pink ribbons pop up on products everywhere. We can buy items we would normally buy and feel good about helping find a cure," but Tobias said that the ties between Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood are very real.

"If Komen's mission is to find a cure for breast cancer, why are they giving huge sums of money to Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider?" she asked. "... Komen says the grants are used to fund breast exams and mammograms. However, numerous reports confirm that Planned Parenthood doesn't do mammograms. What Planned Parenthood does do is abortion."

Planned Parenthood affiliates offer physical breast exams, but not mammograms. Tobias added, "There is a substantial body of evidence to show that getting an abortion increases the risk of breast cancer."

JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Border Springs Church, Caledonia



2. McAnally recognition



5. Pleasant Hill Church, Tippah County



7. Quinn licensing

1. **Border Springs Church, Caledonia**, dedicated their new education building. Shown are church members and pastor David Westmoreland.

2. **First Church, Belmont**, hosted a surprise dinner in honor of retiring music minister Steve McAnally. McAnally has served the church since February, 1987. Pastor Ray Burks and the congregation had a dinner in his honor and presented him with a plaque, money wreath, and a special video presentation. Shown are Burks and McAnally.

3. **First Church, Lumberton**, will host the Erwin Family in concert Jan. 17, 6 p.m. A love offering will be received.

4. **Cedar View Church, Olive Branch**, will host The Almost Famous Carl Crains in concert Jan. 21, 6 p.m.

5. The youth of **Pleasant Hill Church, Tippah County**, presented their Christmas program Dec. 18. Shown are the participants.

7. **North Greenwood Church, Greenwood**, licensed Jesse Quinn to the gospel ministry. He has been accepted as a student at Southwestern Seminary, Fort Worth, Tex. Shown are Brenda Quinn, Quinn, and pastor Jim Phillips, Sr.

8. **Poplar Springs Church, Mendenhall**, recognized Truman Cline for 40 years of service as deacon. Shown are Cline and pastor Ted Bowlin.

9. **Joe Hill**, retired missions director for Franklin Association, is available for supply, interim, and homecomings. He may be contacted at (601) 373-2459, or at 276 Parks Road, Jackson, MS 39212.



8. Cline recognition

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Iranian pastor could remain in prison another year

ISTANBUL (AP) — A pastor in Iran sentenced to death for refusing to recant his faith may have to wait another year in prison for a ruling on whether the sentence will be upheld, according to sources.

Yousef (also spelled Youcef) Nadarkhani, sentenced to death after a court of appeals in Rasht, Iran, found him guilty of leaving Islam, has been in prison since October 2009, yet his lawyers said they were told to not expect any movement on his case for another year.

The news we have about Yousef is not official, but that's what the lawyers are saying, a member of the Church of Iran who requested anonymity told Compass. "The lawyers speak to the judges' secretaries and hear things. Rasht is not a big city, so it is easy to know what is happening."

The head of Iran's judiciary, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, has reportedly ordered the presiding judge over the trial in Rasht to do nothing for one year.

The court in Rasht, 150 miles northwest of Tehran, was expected to pronounce a verdict on Nadarkhani's appeal in October. Instead of pronouncing a verdict, the court sent the Christian's case to the nation's Islamic authority, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, to make a ruling. Sources said the court's long silence bodes ill.

Authorities have also continued to pressure Nadarkhani to recant his faith while in prison. In September they gave him Islamic literature aimed at discrediting the Bible, according to sources, and instructed him to read it. The court reportedly has been told to use whatever means necessary to compel Nadarkhani to recant his faith.

The anonymous Christian who spoke to Compass said he didn't believe that Nadarkhani would be executed soon, but he said authorities were tense about his case, indicating that nothing was certain.

Some Iranian Christians have said that, in the face of international outrage over the case, the government would announce a verdict near the Christmas holidays so that it would receive less notice.

Christian leaders in Iran have called for prayer for their leaders and congregations over the Christmas and New Year period, as there are fears that pressures on churches may intensify in the coming days, according to advocacy group Middle East Concern (MEC).

"These fears stem partly from the waves of arrests last Christmas and New Year, and also the previous year, in which several dozen believers were detained," MEC reported in a press statement. "Two of those arrested in late December 2010, Farshid and Noorollah, remain in prison."

Farshid Fathi, 32, has been in the notorious Evin Prison in Tehran since Dec. 26, 2010. He is married and has



Nadarkhani

two young children. Noorollah Qabitzade, a Christian convert and a house church leader held in Ahwaz in southwestern Iran, has been in prison since Christmas Eve of last year. Between December of last year and February, authorities arrested scores of Christians. All have been released, except for Qabitzade and Fathi.

Authorities arrested Nadarkhani in his home city of Rasht in Oct. 2009 on charges that he questioned obligatory religion classes in Iranian schools. After finding him guilty of apostasy, the court of appeals in Rasht in November 2010 issued a written confirmation of his charges and death sentence.

At an appeal hearing in June this year, the Supreme Court of Iran upheld Nadarkhani's sentence but asked the court in Rasht to determine if he was a practicing Muslim before his conversion. The court declared

that Nadarkhani was not a practicing Muslim before his conversion, but that he was still guilty of apostasy due to his Muslim ancestry.

The Supreme Court had also determined that his death sentence could be annulled if he recanted his faith. Nadarkhani refused to do so. His final appeal hearings ended on Sept. 28, and the court was expected to make its final decision two weeks from the final hearing.

Nadarkhani's lawyer, Mohammad

Ali Dadkhah, also faces charges for "actions and propaganda against the Islamic regime," due to his human rights activities.

In addition, this month Iranian authorities sentenced Alireza Seyedian to six years imprisonment for being baptized in Turkey and uploading a video of his baptism to the Internet, according to Mohabat News. Seyedian is another member of the Church of Iran, and Dadkhah is also representing him. As Christians in Iran are held hostage to the government's political whims, some Iranian Christians say the key to their freedom is continued pressure from the international community.

Editor's note: Compass Direct News, based in Santa Ana, Ca., focuses on Christians worldwide who are persecuted for their faith. Used by permission.

The Persecuted Church

Iranian Christian leaders are calling for prayer throughout this time, as last year's Christmas and New Year period brought several arrests.

REVIVALS AND HOMECOMINGS

1. **West Gulfport Church, Gulf Coast Association:** 65th anniversary celebration, Jan. 29; services, 10:30 a.m., followed by dinner on the grounds, singing, and sharing service.
2. **Military Church, Sumrall:** Harvest Weekend, Jan. 6-7; Fri. - Sat., 7 p.m.; Sun., 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch, and 1 p.m.; Gary M. Bowlin, speaker; Kevin Price, music.

COLLEGE NEWS

1. Registration for the spring semester at **Blue Mountain College** will be held from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Jan. 9 in Lowrey Administration Building. New students are required to attend new student orientation Jan. 9 from 8:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. Registration will follow. Evening registration will be held in Lowrey Administration Building Jan. 9 from 1:30 p.m. until 5 p.m. Evening classes begin Jan. 9, day classes begin on Jan. 10, and Term I online classes start on Jan. 12. For more information, call the Office of Admissions at (662) 685-4771 or (800) 235-0136. Additional registration details may be found at <http://www.bmc.edu/spring12reg.asp>
2. **Manifold Greatness: The Creation and Afterlife of the King James Bible**, a traveling exhibition opening at the Sarah Gillespie Museum on William

Carey University's Hattiesburg campus on January 19, celebrates the 400th anniversary of the first printing of the King James Bible in 1611 and examines its fascinating and complex history. The traveling exhibit was organized by the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., and the American Library Association Public Programs Office. The library is sponsoring free programs and other events for the public in connection with the exhibition. For more information, visit <http://library.wmcarey.edu>, or contact Sherry Laughlin at (601) 318-6170 or slaughlin@wmcarey.edu. The exhibit will be available for viewing Monday-Thursday, from 9 a.m.-7 p.m.; Fridays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; and Sundays, 1-5 p.m. **Manifold Greatness: The Creation and Afterlife of the King James Bible** will be on display on the Carey campus until February 16.



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Pastor: Christian presence threatened at Air Force Academy

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (BP) — Recent actions by the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Co., could appear as if commanders are on a mission to rid the institution of Christian influence, but a nearby pastor says the actions are the result of intense pressure from one man.

The most recent flap involved a lunchtime announcement and subsequent e-mail encouraging cadets to participate in Operation Christmas Child, an annual program of Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse relief organization.

"Please consider spending some of your valuable time and money to love on a kid around the world," the email said.

Commanders initially said there was nothing wrong with the academy's involvement in the program, but when pressed they apologized and assigned the project to the academy's chaplains who can legally recruit for religious endeavors, The Colorado Springs Gazette reported.

Before that, it was an ethics class on just war theory that was halted because complaints were raised about Scripture verses being used in the course. In February, an annual prayer luncheon drew a lawsuit and caused commanders to clarify that the event was sponsored by chaplains and not the academy.

In November, the Los Angeles Times carried this headline: Air Force Academy adapts to pagans, druids, witches and Wiccans.

"In the still of a cold November evening, a small gathering of pagans, led by two witches, begins preparations for the coming winter solstice," the article began. "But these are not just any pagans, and this is not just any setting. They are future officers of the United States Air Force practicing their faith in the basement of the Air Force Academy's cadet

chapel."

It turns out the academy in 2011 dedicated an \$80,000 outdoor "Stonehenge-like" worship center, as the newspaper put it, for cadets with "Earth-based" religions.

"We're here to accommodate all religions, period," Chaplain Maj. Darren Duncan said, noting the current cadet class includes 11 Muslims, 16 Buddhists, 10 Hindus, and three pagans as well as 43 self-identified atheists.

Not only does the academy now provide worship space for all, it requires all cadets to complete religious respect training.

Mike Routt, pastor of Circle Drive Church in Colorado Springs, told Baptist Press the hostility toward Christianity at the Air Force Academy is not the result of the leadership there but is in response to pressure from Mikey Weinstein of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation.

Weinstein, an Air Force Academy graduate, is described on the foundation's website as "the undisputed leader of the national movement to restore the obliterated wall separating church and state in the most technologically lethal organization ever created by humankind: the United States armed forces."

For a decade, Weinstein served as a military attorney, and he worked in the White House as legal counsel for President Reagan. In 2006, he began focusing his attention on "the nonprofit charitable foundation he founded to directly battle the far-right militant radical evangelical religious fundamentalists."

Weinstein is the author of the book, *With God On Our Side: One Man's War Against an Evangelical Coup in America's Military*. This year he was named the inaugural Person of the Year by Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

Routt, who serves on the Southern Baptist Convention's

Executive Committee, described Weinstein as a person who angrily threatens lawsuits and pushes unsubstantiated claims on his foundation's website, militaryreligiousfreedom.org.

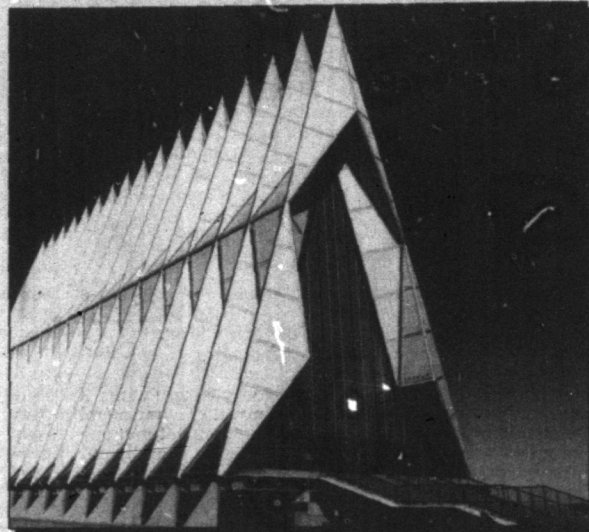
"He even says the Constitution is to guarantee both freedom of religion and freedom from religion," Routt said, adding that he suspects part of Weinstein's motivation for making outlandish claims is financial gain from those who support his viewpoint.

Routt said Weinstein is able to portray Operation Christmas Child in a negative light because his readers are not familiar with the program. In a letter to supporters, Weinstein called it "a project of internationally-infamous Islamophobe Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse organization."

"Ostensibly meant to bring a bit of 'Christmas cheer' to children in disaster areas and war-stricken nations, this missionary program masquerading as an innocuous charity uses deliveries of toys and toiletries as a Trojan horse to sneak Graham's fundamentalist Christian ministry of Jesus Christ into 'heathen' nations such as Japan, Libya, Haiti and Iraq," Weinstein wrote.

The Military Religious Freedom Foundation believes religious freedom "takes on an additional importance in the current international environment, where religious motivations are an increasing rationale for waging conflict."

"At a time when the United States is encouraging greater religious freedom in Muslim nations, it is imperative upon America to show by example that religious pluralism is a viable and preferred option," the website says. "Any sign of hypocrisy in United States policy, official or otherwise, toward the free exercise of religion within the military makes it more difficult to convince others to follow our nation's chosen path."



U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel

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STAFF CHANGES



1. The Rogers

1. Lowery Creek Church, Seminary, has called Paul Rogers as pastor. Rogers was born in Pennsylvania and resides now in Ellisville. He has served in many different areas in the U.S. Army as chaplain for 23 years. He is shown with his wife Patsy.
2. First Church, Belmont, has called Caleb Ramey as minister of music and youth. He comes with wife, Allaina and daughter Hattie from First Church, Rogersville, Ala.

Church security: Firearms in church bring comfort, alarm

By Chester L. Quarles
Correspondent

Fifth in a seven-part,
aperiodical series

Church "spree" shooting events have caused a lot of concern. Unfortunately, acts of violence within church structures and on church properties occur on a regular basis. Many churches have responded in unique ways.

The Louisiana House of Representatives recently passed House Bill 68 which allows, but does not mandate, churches to establish a security plan for their membership, permitting members of the congregation who possess concealed weapon carry permits to take their guns to church.

The bill also requires an eight-hour firearms course at local law enforcement agencies.

House Bill 68 has been quite controversial and divisive across denominational lines.

The Catholic Church in Louisiana universally opposed it. Other denominations have embraced it.

Whatever your church does should be accomplished with the full approval of your membership. Since no institution operates in a vacuum, you should obtain police or Sheriff Department advice for all of your security plans as well as that of your insurer. It is also recommended that you discuss the gun issue with your local district attorney.



Quarles

Failing in any one of these steps can prove problematic.

Generally it is recognized that firearms should be used only in cases where human life is in danger, that it would be better to allow thieves to steal rather than exchange bullets in a sanctuary where innocent worshipers might be injured or killed.

All of the rules change when a spree killer starts shooting at random, however.

The generally recommended rule by major house of worship insurers is that serving police officers should be the only personnel authorized by the church to bring concealed weapons on premises. Retired police officers and detectives who stay current in terms of marksmanship requirements could also be allowed to participate in viable security programs.

The idea of well-intentioned worshipers carrying firearms to church causes a great deal of concern, especially if they are casual shooters and rarely practice.

Gunplay response in a crowded environment requires exceptional skill, along with nerves of steel. Holiday shooters are often

great marksmen, blowing tin cans up in the air and then shooting them again — but the cans can't shoot back. Police officers and former police officers have been trained in stress shooting and are better prepared for crowd shootings, but even then there are problems! Using a firearm in a crowded environment requires extraordinary proficiency.

I don't want to sound hypercritical. I have carried a concealed weapon for over forty years. When I was a state police investigator and later a narcotics agent, I was required to be armed at all times. The weapons were concealed, but every now and then someone would jostle my pistol at church and then question my mental and/or spiritual well-being.

One lady actually screamed when she realized I was armed and wasn't comforted by the fact that I had carried a weapon to that church for 22 years without using it. On the other hand, one pastor's wife usually sat on the pew with my family. When I asked her why, she stated that she knew I would protect her.

My own value system is unique. I had rather replace the Lord's offering out of my own pocket than shoot a fellow human being. Since a defensive shot is usually aimed at the mid-chest, it would normally be fatal. I would prefer not to protect the offering plate or individuals being robbed within the church. The thief can face God's Judgment Seat later.

I will always attempt to protect the worshiper, however, and predators shooting at worshipers must be stopped. A robber who also wants to take a teenager with him as he leaves must also be restrained.

Only the worshipers can do this, since the crime is over before most police officers can respond. The shooter must be stopped within the church if he is to be stopped at all.

Quarles is professor emeritus of criminal justice at the University of Mississippi in Oxford and co-author of the book, *Crime Prevention for Houses of Worship*. He may be contacted at cquarles@olemiss.edu. Copyright 2011. Used by permission.

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17



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Pastor
Hope Baptist Church
Las Vegas, NV



James Merritt
Pastor
Cross Pointe Baptist Church
Duluth, GA



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Girl Scouts local chapters allowing 'transgendered' boys to join troops

COVINGTON, La. (BP) — Girl Scouts USA's recent revelation that its local chapters sometimes induct boys who try to live as girls, often referred to as "transgendered" individuals is already having repercussions in Louisiana where three troops at a Christian school have disbanded in disappointment.

Susan Bryant-Snure of Lacombe, La., is one of three troop leaders at Northlake Christian School who resigned and are dismantling their troops because the policy is in conflict with that of the host

school. Her three daughters, ages 10, six and four, are among 25 girls who had been active scouts there.

Instead, Northlake is investigating alignment with American Heritage Girls, a group organized in 1995 in protest to the Girl Scouts' decision to allow scouts to replace the word, "God," in scout teachings with a word representing a personal image of God, such as "higher being," "Allah," or "Buddha."

The newer group proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord, limits membership to girls, and works to disciple girls as Christians.

The issue came to light late last month when a mother in Denver, Co., tried to gain entry into the Girl Scouts for her son, a biological seven-year-old male who seeks to live as a girl. Initially turned away, the mother called a press conference in protest. This led the Colorado chapter to reveal its practice of inclusion, which evaluates the admission of boys, albeit transgendered, on a case-by-case basis.

While the Denver boy had not been admitted as of early December, the Colorado group is discussing the matter with the mother and is amenable to admitting the boy if he is living

as a girl, explained Rachelle Trujillo, vice president for communications of the Colorado Girl Scouts.

"We accept all girls in kindergarten through 12th grade as members. If a child identifies as a girl and the child's family presents her as a girl, Girl Scouts of Colorado welcomes her as a Girl Scout," the Colorado chapter said in its official statement.

It further said that "requests for support of transgender kids have grown."

The national organization, Girl Scouts of the USA "is saying that councils can make these decisions on a case-by-case basis," Trujillo said. "If a child is living as a girl, that's good enough for us. We don't require any proof of gender. It's absolutely a case-by-case basis. There's not any rational fear of Girl Scouts being overrun by boys."

Transgendered children are currently serving in Girl Scout troops in the U.S., Trujillo said, although she declined to give details. "There are other councils that have transgendered girls and it's working out fine. It's truly isolated and rare to have a transgendered child. It's kind of uncharted territory for all of us."

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GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups - and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with love and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR 2012

from the Baptist
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BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Seeking Purity in a Sensual Culture

Ephesians 5:1-5, 8-12, 15-16



catch myself subconsciously imitating daddy in multiple mannerisms or sayings that he once used.

As a child of God we ought to imitate our Father in love; and the imitation of God the Father turns out to be the imitation of Christ the Son. We were created as sensual beings

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which means we respond to physical senses as a source of pleasure. However, self-centered vices in conduct and speech (sexual immorality and any impurity or greed [vs. 3-4]) are the opposite of the self-sacrificing love spoken of in verses 1-2. The way we imitate God is to live a life (walk) in love; and as the preceding section affirms, a life of love is characterized by forgiveness. When we, in love, forgive others, we put their well-being ahead of our own comfort and desires. Lust is directed inward (serving self); love is directed outward (serving others). This self-giving,

serving life that is lived in perfect obedience to God and perfect love to men becomes a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God as was the life of Christ that was given in love for us.

For you were once darkness, but now [you are] light in the Lord (v. 8). The special point here is that he does not say, "You were in darkness before"; there was indeed some light in the world around them, as God had not left Himself without a witness (Foulkes). He says rather that "darkness was in them" (Abbot). You were darkness. Their lives and not just their environment were dark. "But now, he [Paul] continues, you are light in the Lord." In effect, "If you are in the Lord, you are in the light, and the light is in you." Be what you are! As you live as the light of the world, the "fruit of the light" results in all goodness, righteousness and truth (v. 9) — in a word, the fruit of sterling character (Hughes).

Notice that the apostle does not set one kind of fruit over

against another kind. It is a matter of fruit or no fruit — the fruitless works of darkness. Darkness does not produce fruit. Paul is emphatic, "Take no part in," or "Have nothing to do with," or "Do not share or participate" in the fruitless works of darkness. Rather, expose them. The word expose once meant "to reprove," "to rebuke," "to disgrace," or "to shame." However, what Paul is advocating in this verse is for Christians to live their lives in such a different way from those around them that, rather than by reproof of speech, they "expose" their sins with the light of a life lived to the glory of God. Paul's idea is that of a silent witness or process that is comparable to the action of light (Scott). We, indeed, have a choice as to how we are to live (walk). Paul says, "Choose wisely!" (v. 15)

Page is chair of the Department of Christian Studies and Philosophy at Mississippi College and a member of First Church, Clinton.

By Burn Page

Paul stated multiple times in Ephesians that there should be a distinction between the way a Christian lives (walks) and the way a non-Christian lives: And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world (2:2); Therefore I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received (4:1); Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their thoughts (4:17); Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God (5:1); for you were once

darkness, but now [you are] light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (5:17); Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk — not as unwise people but as wise (5:15).

In Ephesians 5 Paul gave at least three actions descriptive of a Christian's life. First, we are to walk in love (Eph. 5:1-5); second, we are to walk in the light (Eph. 5:8-12); and third, we are to walk in wisdom (5:15-16).

Paul commanded, "Therefore, be imitators of God." As a child imitates his parents, so ought a believer to imitate God. I remember one day as a little boy I was following my daddy, and I was consciously trying to step in his footprints as I walked behind him. Now as a grown man, I

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Stay Focused on the Goal

Numbers 32:1, 5-8, 16-18, 20-24; 32: 51-53

By Melleen Moore

In yesteryear in the farming industry, mules were the source of plow power for cultivating. The harness was equipped with blinders to keep the mule focused on the task in front of him. It minimized the distractions and made the task more manageable. We, as Christians today, need to stay focused on the goal of living as God's people in a sin sick world. The Children of Israel needed to be focused on the task in front of them to possess the promised land. Nearing the end of forty years in the wilderness, they were camped in the plains of Moab on the east side of the Jordan River across from Jericho. Moses had recorded a travel log of their journey, taken a second census of the tribes, named the leaders to assist in the land division as

well as established laws and instructions.

It's Not About Just Me and Mine
Numbers 32:1, 5-8

Noting the land in the plains was suitable for cattle and sheep with adequate pasture and water, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and later the half tribe of Manasseh desired to settle on the east side of the Jordan. This land was outside the border of the land that God had promised the Israelites. God had gone before the Israelites to defeat the inhabitants of the plains and make way for them. The request may have seemed a bit selfish to Moses as his focus was on possessing Canaan. Moses was concerned with the effect this request would have on the confidence of the other tribes as well as the loss of some 84,000 troops. He had



Moore

an immediate flash back of the spies whose report discouraged the Israelites from entering the promise land earlier causing a forty year delay. The goal was to possess the land that God had promised them with each tribe contributing their part.

It's About Helping Others, Too
Numbers 32: 16-18

Reuben and Gad assured Moses that they were more than willing to assist the other tribes in taking Canaan. Moses understood that their troops would "be armed, ready to go before the Children of Israel" (Numbers 32:17, NKJV). Reuben and Gad ask for time to build sheepfolds which were rough stone structures of four sides high enough to keep wild animals out with a single entrance. The walls may have had thorn vines on the top to further discourage predators that might attack the livestock. They also wanted to build for-

tified cities for their families' protection. The troops were not only willing to go to battle but were willing to lead — a dangerous position. They would stay until Canaan was conquered and all tribes had received their inheritance. The shared goal of possessing the promised land was the focus with each tribe helping.

It's About Fulfilling an Obligation
Numbers 32:20-24

For the tribes to receive the land east of the Jordan, they must fight alongside the other tribes. Moses agreed to the compromise with Reuben and Gad — arm yourselves for war, cross the Jordan with the others to drive out the enemy, and subdue the land. Moses pointed out that a failure to keep the agreement would be a sin against the Lord. He continued with a warning "be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32: 23, NKJV). After the fulfillment of their responsibility, Reuben and Gad with their troops could return to the east side of the Jordan to claim their land.

It's About Living as God's People
Number 33:51-53

The time for fulfilling the promise to Abraham centuries before was near. The Children of Israel were about to experience the promise land; however the people living in Canaan would not go away willingly. God gave specific instructions about possessing the land. The Children of Israel were to drive out the wicked inhabitants of the land and tear down the engraved stones, molded images and the high places of pagan worship. The taking of the land was an act of judgment by God upon the idolatrous people living in Canaan. Upon completion of taking the land, the Children of Israel were to settle in the land as it was given to them to possess. God's plan for possessing the promise land was making way for His people to live a pure life of worship to Him alone.

Moore is a member of Macedonia Church, Petal.

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Bhutan Christians work through persecution

SOUTH ASIA (BP) — Notes of a sacred hymn fade as Dorji Sangay (not his real name) reads a passage from his Bible. The small congregation follows along in their New Testaments and then discusses the verses.

From where Sangay sits cross-legged on the floor, he can look out the window and see the jagged Himalayan Mountains of his home country, Bhutan. His heart aches to go home. He was forced to leave after being tortured and released from prison in the late 1990s. The crime he committed was sharing Christ.

Sangay's attention is drawn from the window and his "promised land" back to the Bible study when a woman starts talking to God. The prayer makes him smile. Just a few years ago, his people had no idea how to pray or sing worship songs in their language nor did they have any Bible passages. In fact, there were very few believers back then.

Now, he teaches them how to do the same thing that got him arrested — proclaiming the Gospel.

So much has changed for Bhutanese Christians during the last decade that it's nothing short of a miracle, one that Southern Baptists helped pray into place.

In 2001, Southern Baptists committed their National Day of Prayer and Fasting for World Evangelization to the only country recognized as a Tibetan Buddhist kingdom, Bhutan. Baptists prayed for everything from Bible translations to discipleship training to greater religious freedoms.

Sangay and other Christian workers say the prayers continue to be answered. "In the past 10 to 12 years, we have worked so hard. We are sharing openly and we win lots of people to the Lord. We baptized a lot of people and we started new churches. The prayers are working."

Repression eases

In the mid-1990s, Bhutan's government banned Christianity, concerned that it could be a divisive religion if it grew too strong. It was against the law to coerce anyone to believe differently. Persecution was widespread during this



SPINNING FOR NEXT LIFE — One way Bhutanese Buddhists believe they can earn merit is through spinning prayer wheels. They hope to accrue enough good karma in order to ensure a better reincarnation. (BP photo)

time, and Sangay was jailed and tortured several times in a four-year span.

Some religious freedom was officially granted in 2000, but sources outside Bhutan do not credit any gains until 2007. Even now, Christians can face difficulty if they proselytize and are prohibited from celebrating non-Buddhist festivals.

"Bhutan has just become a democracy because of our king's initiative. Our system is slowly changing," Sangay says optimistically. "Yes, there is freedom of religion. We are allowed

to have faith in Jesus now. But we are not allowed to preach."

Freedom of religion is still a tricky thing, Sangay says. Believers still are persecuted. One man was sentenced last year to a three-year prison term for showing so-called Christian films.

The easiest way to explain Bhutan's version of religious freedom, Sangay says, is to think about relationships. He says it is not safe to share the Gospel with strangers. "If you share with a stranger and the stranger is anti-

Christian, you run the risk of him reporting you and putting you behind bars. You have to know the person and build a relationship before you can share."

Yet, Bhutanese believers do not pray that the persecution will go away. Instead, they work through it. Every time a Christian purchases a meal that is filled with sand, and every time the power is turned off for the church but not the rest of the village, they pray God draws them closer and shows them how to reach more people.

Korean period of uncertainty ushered in by death of 'Dear Leader'



GUARD DUTY — North Korean soldiers guard a six-inch-high concrete divider that splits the Korean peninsula into communist North Korea and capitalist South Korea. Known as the Military Demarcation Line, the marker is located in the Joint Security area near the abandoned village of Panmunjom. With the recent death of North Korea's hard-line dictator, Kim Jong Il, South Korea has moved to full military alert amid fears of instability and political maneuvering in the desperately poor and isolated nuclear-armed North. (BP photo)

•NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP and local reports) — Christians around the world have taken to social media to mobilize in prayer after the death of North Korea's Kim Jong Il, the Stalinist totalitarian who insisted on being known as the "Dear Leader" of one of the world's most oppressive regimes.

Kim died Dec. 17 of a heart attack while riding a train, according to North Korea's official KCNA news agency. A period of national mourning was declared through Dec. 29. In keeping with the cult of personality that demands the Kim family be worshipped as dieties, Kim Jong Il's youngest son Kim Jong Eun is moving to take complete control of the country as did his father and grandfather before him.

As North Korean leaders pronounce an increase in "military capability" — and South Korea moves to full military

alert in fear of instability in the poor and isolated nuclear-armed nation — many wonder what will happen next.

Within minutes of the official announcement of Kim's death Dec. 19, Christians around the globe began posting prayer requests on Twitter and Facebook on behalf of the region. "Praying for North and South Korea," Jeana Lim, a Korean American living in Saratoga, Ca., wrote on her Facebook page. "God, let your will be done."

Although prayer for the impoverished North Korea is nothing new among evangelical Christians, the death of the 69-year-old leader and the many unknowns surrounding his successor, youngest son Kim Jong Un, have increased anxiety throughout the region, especially as the North test-fired a missile Dec. 19 over the East Sea.

"Wow! Kim Jong Il is dead..." wrote Dale Brown, a former resi-

dent of Seoul who now lives in the Middle East. "This could be a big game-changer. Let us all be praying for North Korea! For such a time as this!"

As questions about the future loom, Luke In (not his real name), a Korean-American Christian worker based in Southeast Asia, prays that this advent season will bring God's peace to the region. "Praying for North Korea," wrote In. "May the true Son reign; the hearts of North Koreans this season. He is our hope."

Among the ways to pray for North Korea:

- for peace and stability within North Korea and the region during the transition of political power to Kim Jong Un.
- that the transition will result in greater freedoms for all North Korean citizens.
- for greater openness and religious freedom within the reclusive nation.